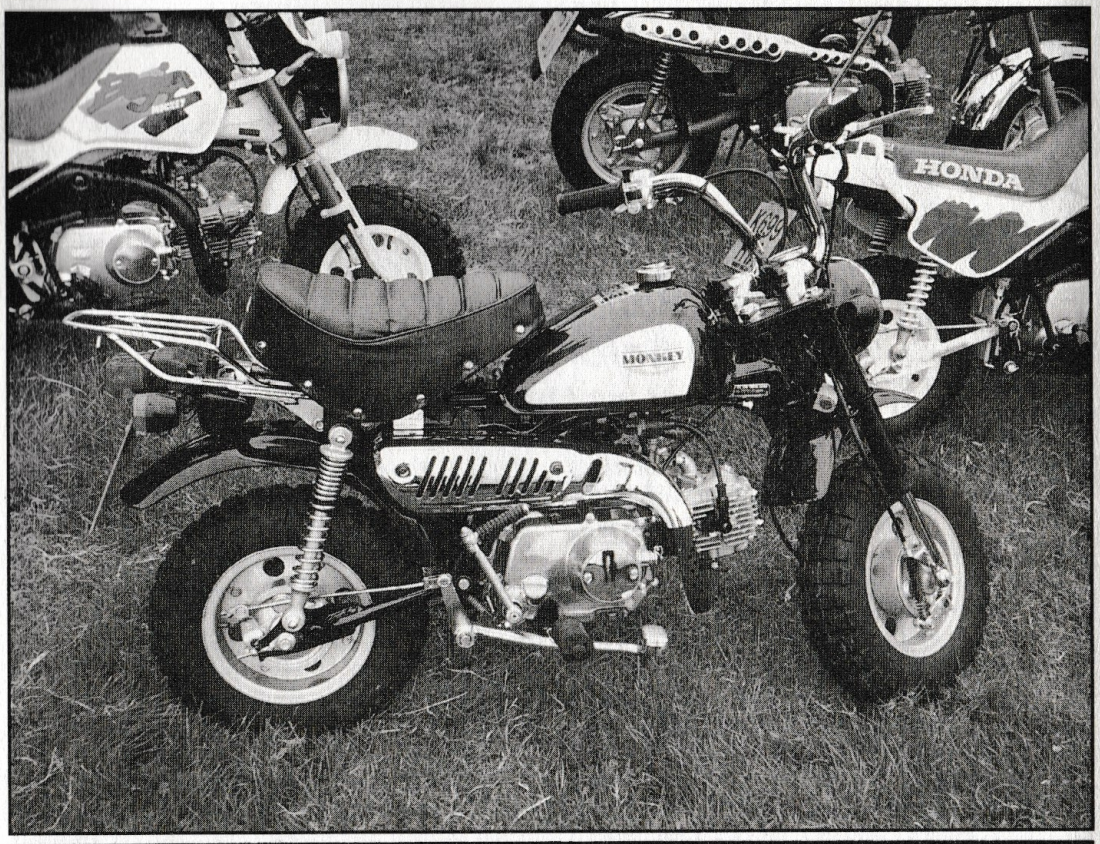
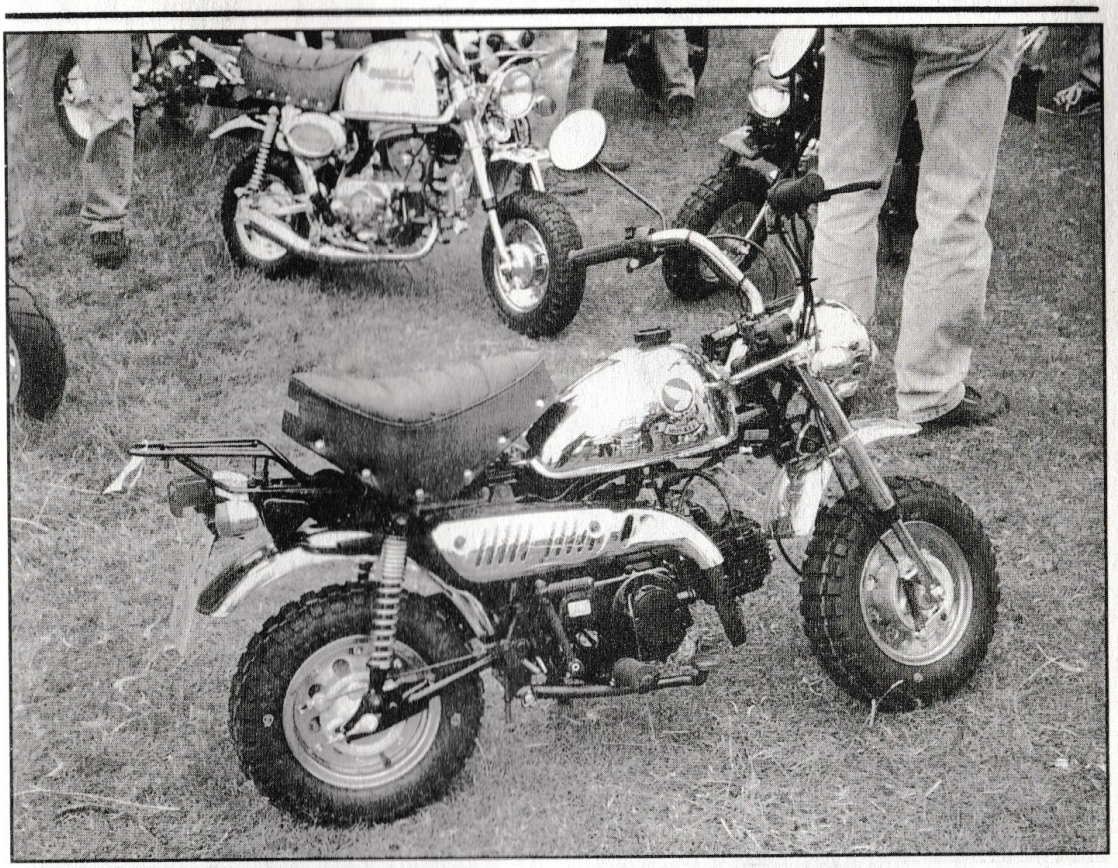


Monkey Business!

PEOPLE'S REACTION WHEN THEY SPOT A Monkey bike for the first time varies. Not much though. Some will cooo and aahh and say how cute it is. Others will rock around hooting with laughter. Trouble is, the Monkey bike has been around for quite a while now and continues to remain popular. So despite the usual reactions, Mr Honda must have known what he was doing when the Monkey was first released – well, Mr Honda has made a bit of cash. And though Honda seem to spend loads of money on advertising, Press and PR on their latest hot poop mega whiz it has to be noted that it was the small boring stuff like the Monkey bike that made the dosh for Honda.

Kids charge around their paddocks on them, frightening one's elder sister's pony. Other kids charge around the fields and woods frightening the old git walking his dog. Even bigger kids use them to charge around the pits on race day, moving swiftly from their mobile homes to the garage for a last minute lap on their 500 Grand Prix bike. The last activity is in decline though (Monkeys not GPs) as the new kids on the block seem to prefer fully automatic scooters. Perhaps they like a rest from gear changes. After all, 500cc 2-strokes do like a lot of gears. That's gears not gear – well for most any rate!

With its air-cooled 50cc single cylinder 4-stroke engine (borrowed from the Honda C50) propelling a bike weighing 65kg through a 3-speed gearbox and centrifugally operated automatic clutch, the Honda Monkey is not going to set your pants on fire. In fact, with an estimated peak power of 6bhp at 8000rpm you can expect a mind numbing top speed of just 35mph.



You could probably increase performance by using parts from the very rare Honda CB90 motorbike version of the C90 step through. The CB90 has a manual clutch which the techno-mechanics among you would probably be able to graft onto the C50 engine, thereby allowing racing gear changes. Mind you, you could always try banging the whole CB90 engine in!

With its 50cc engine, the Honda Monkey is not going to set your pants on fire!

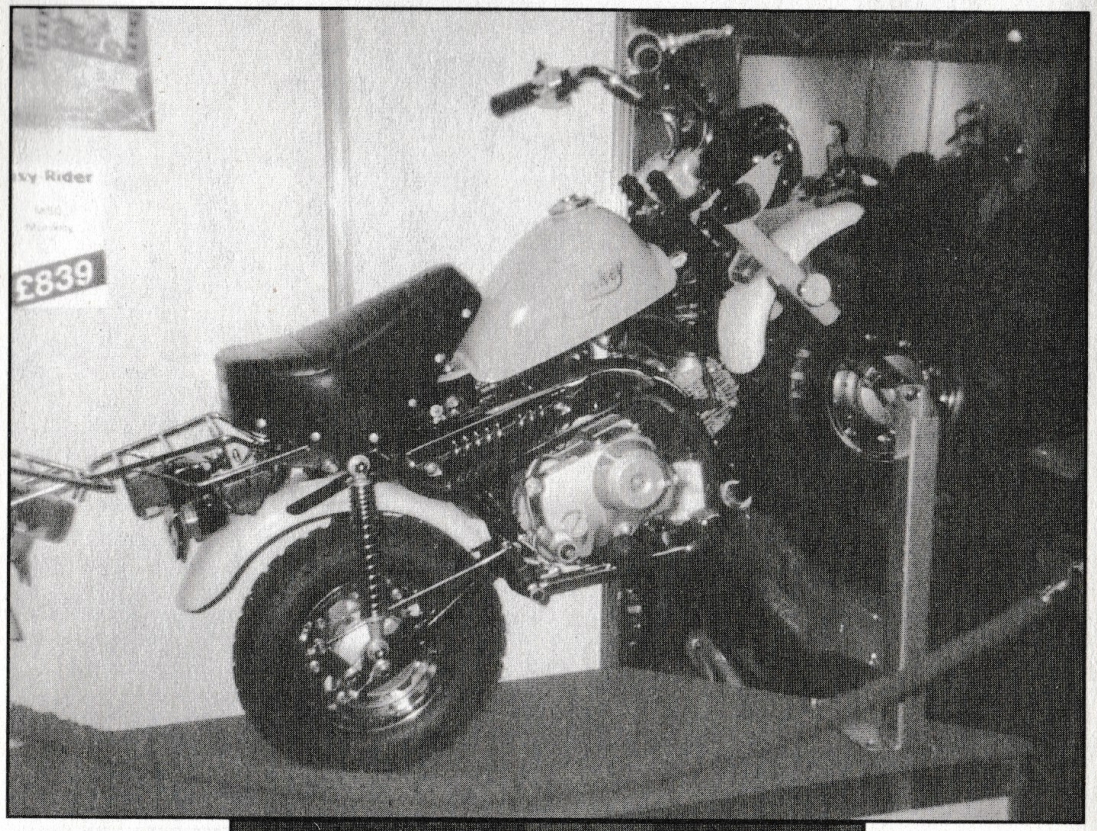
There are specialist clubs that exist for Monkey bikes where you can share ideas and yarn long into the night about those crazy, crazy days on the Queen's highway where men are men and Monkey bikes are ... erm ... small. Like most specialists, the club people can put you in touch with companies who can supply tuning and custom parts. Really.

In 1972 Honda produced the Gorilla, which is the same formula but a bit bigger. In addition there was the Dax. Same idea again but this time with folding handlebars and a system for easily draining the carburettor float bowl of its fuel, enabling you to carry the Dax in the boot of your car. The idea was that you could park your car out of town and then ride in the rest of the way on your congestion beating Dax. The fact that it would never occur to most be-suited businessmen to forsake their warm, comfortable status symbol for an unusually styled moped never seemed to occur to the designers. Besides, their mobile phone would get wet.

You can still buy yourself one of these historical (or is that hysterical?) machines. The Monkey bike is now made under license in China by a company called Jialing. Imports and sales are dealt with in the UK by Easy Rider (Europe) Ltd.

The specifications for their M50 Monkey Bike are still much the same as ever, with a readily recognisable C50 derived engine, though it's now

READERS' WHEELS



sporting CDI ignition. Still driving through a centrifugal automatic clutch, 3-speed gearbox and 3.50 x 10 tyres, the engine still sips fuel from its 1 gallon fuel tank. A seat height of 28 inches (711mm) and a weight of 132lbs (60kg) complete the picture.

Almost a Monkey but a bit more versatile is the CJ70 Holiday by Jialing. This is the 'Monkey Bike for the open road'. Its larger and more (hee-hee) powerful 70cc engine can manage a 4-speed gearbox, although there is still the centrifugal clutch. The seat height remains the same as the M50 Monkey but the weight is up to 165lbs (75kg).

So there you have it. If you want a runaround or field bike for the kids; this'll do. If you want something to potter round the estate on; this'll do. If you want to be different or make a fashion statement riding along your local high street, then the Monkey bike will very much make you stand out from the crowd.

They are cute though!

Steve Bergman / UBG